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**Subject: "UNESCO History Project"**

Sir/Madam,

As you are aware, the Organization's Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007 makes provision for the elaboration of a retrospective reflection on UNESCO's past orientations, activities and accomplishments. It also specifies that such an activity will be funded from extrabudgetary resources and carried out in cooperation with NGOs (31 C/4 Approved, para. 123).

In this context, I wish to draw your attention to the great benefit your country could derive from promoting such a reflection process during the 2004-2005 biennium. For my part, I attach a great deal of importance to looking back over our Organization's history on the eve of its sixtieth anniversary, which could provide it with useful information about its past and clear-sighted perspectives for its future.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that other agencies in the United Nations system are involved in similar efforts and that the United Nations itself, under the patronage of the Secretary-General, has launched a major project entitled "The United Nations Intellectual History Project". This project, which is supported by a number of foundations and Member States, has already published a first volume in 2001 devoted to the ideals and the future challenges of the United Nations, which has been awarded the "Choice Outstanding Academic Book of 2003" Prize. UNESCO's initiative could of course fit into the federating framework of such a research programme.

The main purpose of this initiative is to promote UNESCO's collections and holdings among the general public and researchers, to examine the Organization's place in the sphere of international relations and to initiate a wide range of studies on the action and impact of the Organization. This "decentralized" approach to the history of UNESCO could foster a better understanding of the way in which the Organization's action, seen from the periphery rather than from the centre, has been perceived and experienced by the different actors concerned.

Such an activity, if it meets with sufficient support from you, could be presented at the next congress of the International Committee of Historical Sciences scheduled to take place in Sydney, Australia, in July 2005. In the meantime, UNESCO will undertake in 2004 a series of activities to stimulate critical reflection on its history. These activities will include in particular:

- the development of web pages containing information on UNESCO's history and archives;
- the organization of regular meetings between staff members (former and serving) and researchers on specific historical subjects;

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- the compilation of historical materials for the training of new staff members;
- the preparation of a symposium on major study themes and historical approaches to UNESCO's history. This symposium will take place in November 2005 on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Organization.

Apart from these activities, a scientific committee with an advisory role for the "UNESCO History Project" could be set up following the 2005 symposium. This scientific committee would be composed of historians from different regions and cultures of the world, thereby combining a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches and views. Depending on the extrabudgetary resources mobilized, the committee could take all appropriate measures to encourage and make full use of historical research on the Organization. Such initiatives might include, for example:

- the awarding by the scientific committee of study grants to doctoral students preparing their theses on subjects related to the history of UNESCO;
- the creation of UNESCO Chairs in the history of international organizations;
- the publication of monographs, books and brochures on major themes concerning the history of UNESCO;
- the organization of seminars and symposiums;
- the development of an oral history programme;
- cooperation with similar history projects in other United Nations agencies.

I should therefore be most grateful for your assistance in identifying both extrabudgetary resources that could help fund the project and any eminent persons or institutions wishing to participate. Your suggestions as to worthwhile subjects of study would also be welcome.

Lastly, I seize this opportunity to encourage you to take steps to foster historical research on UNESCO as part of the celebrations to mark the anniversary of your country's admission to UNESCO. In that context, the compilation of inventories or search engines to facilitate the identification of historical sources on your country's relations with UNESCO, would be extremely pertinent.

With many thanks for your kind attention to my request, I should be grateful if you would send me your suggestions and proposals as soon as possible, and not later than 15 June 2004, by addressing them to Mr Jens Boel, Head Archivist (email: [j.boel@unesco.org](mailto:j.boel@unesco.org); tel.: + 33 (0) 1 45 68 19 50; fax: + 33 (0) 1 45 68 56 17), whom I have designated as the focal point of this initiative in the Organization.

Please accept, Sir/Madam, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Koïchiro Matsuura  
Director-General

cc: National Commissions for UNESCO  
Permanent Delegations to UNESCO